

The Johnson Letter

From the desk of
Michigan State Senator

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Fall Legislative Preview

With summer slowly fading away and fall upon us, it is time for the Michigan Legislature to return to session and begin seriously tackling some significant issues postponed by the enormous task of balancing the state budget. Senator Johnson and her colleagues are preparing to set a fall agenda. Listed below is a preview and brief description of what is being considered.

- ♦ **Modernizing the Michigan Credit Union Act**—Independent studies have confirmed time and time again that consumers benefit from a strong and viable credit union presence in Michigan's banking and financial services industry. Michigan's working families typically receive better rates on loans, better returns on savings and better standards of service when credit union competition is part of the mix. The Michigan Credit Union Act's original language stems back seventy-eight years and is in need of drastic modification. Senator Johnson introduced Senate Bill 496 which is scheduled to be voted on by the full Senate.
- ♦ **Committees to Examine Mental Health System**—The Senate Health Policy Committee and the Department of Community Health Appropriations Subcommittee of which Senator Johnson serves, scheduled two of several hearings examining the status of Michigan's Mental Health System. Dates and times for the hearings are set for 1pm Wednesday, Sept. 17th and 1pm Wednesday, Sept. 24th in the Senate Hearing Room, 1st Fl., Boji Tower.
- ♦ **Review Taxpayers State Investments**—The Senate Commerce and Labor Committee, along with the Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development will also hold hearings examining the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's (MEDC) role and the Michigan Economic Growth Authority's (MEGA) tax credit effectiveness.
- ♦ **Construction Zone Safety Package**—Following the death and serious injury of two highway construction workers combined with the loophole in the law which contributed to the acquittal of the aggressive motorist, Senator Johnson will soon introduce legislation standardizing the definition of highway construction zone. Currently, a construction zone does not exist unless a travel lane has been closed to the public.

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Unemployment Benefits Extension Update

In August the Michigan Legislature followed President Bush's lead and provided an additional \$206 million for approximately 53,000 long-term unemployed workers up to 26 weeks. This latest extension was made available to unemployed workers through the TEUC-X and the Extended Benefits (EB) programs. TEUC-X provides up to 13 additional weeks of federal jobless benefits to eligible workers who exhaust their first tier of TEUC benefits. The EB program provides up to 13 more weeks of combined federal and state-funded benefits.

Ordinarily, unemployed Michigan workers qualify for up to 26 weeks of state-funded benefits. However, in early 2002, the federal government began offering 13 weeks of TEUC benefits. The new Michigan law allows for the payment of both TEUC-X and EB. Workers qualify for the TEUC-X benefits if they exhausted their first tier of TEUC after May 24, 2003. Extended benefits will go to those who exhaust their TEUC-X and/or have a benefit year ending after May 24, 2003. Jobless workers must claim their first week of TEUC by December 27, 2003, in order to receive the extension.

If you or someone you know is having problems with receiving their benefits, feel free to call Senator Johnson's office for assistance.

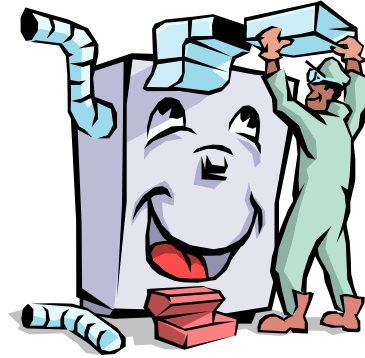


Appliance Service Plan Legislation (Senate Bill 612)

Johnson vocalizes her support

Legislation has recently been introduced (Senate Bill 612) to ensure the right of public utility companies to continue to offer appliance service plans (ASP) for their ratepayers. The proposed measure is in response to the Public Service Commission (PSC) drafting and passing a Code of Conduct, known as the Electric Restructuring Act (Public Act 141 of 2000). The Act requires public utility companies to alter their current method of advertising by December 31, 2002. The PSC believes public utilities have an unfair advantage over the private industry through their ability to include ASP promotions with their ratepayer's monthly energy bill. The relevant public utility companies emphatically argue that they are not subsidizing the ASP. Any profit from the service plans, which is approximately \$14 million annually, is returned to ratepayers in lower gas rates than they would otherwise pay. Furthermore, they argue that they provide a highly effective, cost-efficient service in the peak months of appliance breakdown for 180,000 customers, many of which are low-income senior citizens on fixed budgets that cannot risk long waits and potentially exorbitant rates.

Senator Johnson is a co-sponsor of Senate Bill 612 and is committed to its passage. "I have heard time and again what a well-managed, life-saving program that this has been for many of my constituents, especially the senior community," Johnson noted. "Your many letters, emails and phone calls have not gone unheard." Senate Bill 612 is currently awaiting a vote in the Senate Energy and Technology Committee.



September is Healthy Aging Month

September is Healthy Aging Month and the same healthy habits we worked to instill in our children- good nutrition, exercise and not smoking- are still important as is access to quality health care, including prescription medications.

Yet many prescription drugs are expensive and can impose a financial burden on seniors with fixed or limited incomes. As Congress and President Bush work to find a national solution, it's important to be informed about existing programs that can better help eligible seniors afford prescription medicines. If you have difficulty paying for your prescription drugs, you may be able to find assistance with Michigan's Elder Prescription Insurance Coverage (EPIC) program. Please call the EPIC hotline at 1-866-747-5844 or contact [local senior EPIC center] at [visit www.miepic.com/epiccenters.asp for contact information] for more information.

There are also a number of cost-saving programs offered by individual pharmaceutical companies. Many of the patient assistance programs are directed at seniors and low-income individuals. I am currently developing a directory with information on prescription assistance programs, prescription drug discount cards and helpful toll-free phone numbers. If you would like a copy of this brochure, please contact my office.

CONSUMER ALERT!!

Telephone, Natural Gas and Electric Industries are Changing

The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC), invites you to attend a consumer forum to learn about changes occurring in the electric, natural gas and telephone industries. At the forum, you will be able to get the latest information on electric and natural gas rates for the winter, new opportunities to select an alternative electric or natural gas provider, the status of local and long distance telephone service and the federal "Do Not Call" list. A focus of this year's forums will be a discussion on the increase of wholesale natural gas prices and how the increase will impact monthly bills. A Commissioner will be available to discuss these changes, explain how the Commission makes decisions and listen to your questions and comments regarding utility service.

MPSC Chairman Peter Lark issued a statement "We are concerned about the impact of energy price increases on Michigan citizens this winter. My colleagues and I believe it is important for utility customers to have time to prepare for winter energy bills and make informed decisions about available options. We welcome the opportunity to meet utility customers and hear their comments on these important issues."

The 2003 Consumer Forums are scheduled for 6:00 pm at:

- ◆ **Bloomfield Township** Tuesday, September 23rd City Hall—Council Chambers 1020 City Boulevard
- ◆ **Detroit** Thursday, October 2nd Northwest Activities Center—Ballroom 18100 Meyers Rd

SEPTEMBER HELPFUL HINTS

• CHILDREN'S SAFETY:

Children's Ombudsman.....	800-642-4326
Child Abuse Parent Help Line.....	800-942-4357
Internet Crimes Against	
Children CyberTipLine	877-5CYBER3
Safe Delivery of Newborns.....	866-733-7733

• CONSUMER HELP:

Consumer Protection (Attorney General).....	877-765-8388
FIA Energy Assistance.....	800-292-5650
Health Care Fraud Hotline.....	800-24-ABUSE
Health Facility &	
Nursing Home Complaints.....	800-882-6006
Utility Information & Complaints.....	800-292-9555
Vehicle Sales and Repairs.....	800-292-4204
Insurance, Banking or Securities	
Information and Complaints.....	877-999-6442
Gasoline Complaints.....	800-MDA-FUEL

• Education:

School Safety Hotline.....	800-815-TIPS
K-12 Student Issues.....	888-323-4231
Merit Award Program.....	888-95-MERIT
Michigan Education	
Savings Program.....	877-861-6377
Michigan Education Trust (MET).....	800-MET-4KID
Student Financial Aid.....	877-FA-FACTS

• Environment:

Pollution Emergencies.....	800-292-4706
Report All Poaching (RAP).....	800-292-7800

• Employment:

Michigan Works!	800-285-9675
Bureau of Safety and Regulation.....	800-866-4674
Michigan Rehabilitation Services.....	800-605-6722

Unemployment Questions & Inquiries.....	800-638-3995
Workers' Compensation Information.....	888-396-5041

• Health Care and Safety:

MI Child and Healthy Kids	
(Insurance).....	888-988-6300
Toxics Hotline.....	800-648-6942
West Nile Virus Information (Recorded).....	888-668-0869
Community Health	
Immunization Phoneline.....	888-76-SHOTS
Food Safety Information.....	800-292-3939
RADON Information.....	800-723-6642

• Seniors:

Legal Hotline for Seniors	
and Michigan Pension Rights.....	800-347-5297
Long Term Care Advocate Program.....	800-292-7852
Medicare Inquiry.....	800-482-4045
Medicare/Medicaid Assistance.....	800-803-7174
Social Security.....	800-772-1213
Veterans' Information & Assistance	800-827-0648

• Travel and Recreation:

Travel Michigan.....	88-78-GREAT
MDOT Pothole Hotline.....	888-296-4546
State Parks Reservations.....	800-44-PARKS

• Treasury:

State Income Tax Information.....	800-827-4000
State Taxpayer Assistance.....	800-487-7000
Federal Tax Information.....	800-829-1040

• Emergency Services 9-1-1

Questions or Comments?

Contact Senator

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Please Note: The Johnson Letter is published monthly, for all interested readers, by the Office of State Senator Shirley Johnson. To be removed or added permanently to our mailing list, please contact our office.

FIRST MICHIGAN FALL COLOR UPDATE Fall colors soon to paint the State of Michigan

As warm days turn into cool nights, Michigan's landscape prepares to show its autumn colors. Fall color starts as soon as Labor Day and in some isolated tree limbs even sooner. The first tinges of what many call the state's most beautiful season showcasing Michigan's fall finery, will soon come to a forest near you and early indications point to a very good fall season. Michigan is blessed with vibrant color and plenty of ways to see it. There are more than 18.6 million acres of forestland, two national shorelines, nearly 100 state parks and recreation areas, hundreds of local and regional parks, three national forests and state forests in both peninsulas. Get ready to enjoy the color and live the fall color experience!

